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NOVEL READING AS A MENTAL DISCIPLINE.

Surely this is an age that takes its pleasure seriously. Here are three books¹ appearing within a few months of each other, and all to tell us how to study at or about our play. Novels are no longer, as they were toward the close of the eighteenth century, "pretty generally considered the lowest of all human productions". They are not even regarded as in Thackeray's day as "sweets." They are studies; studies whose curriculum is almost as wide as that of the great universities; studies of passion and jealousy, of sense and sensibility, of pride and prejudice; studies of the aristocracy, of the commercial classes, of the clergy, of the workmen, and of those who won't work; and already England has echoes of the French naturalism. If we have not yet our Madame Gervaise, or our Germinie Lacerteux, to be silent of their Fille Eliza, we have not wholly outgrown the charms of the *novela picaresca*, and literary slumming is still a road to notoriety if not to success. Nor is fiction satisfied with studies of what we may call psycho-pathology, and with what Diderot would have called the novel of characters or states. The novel with a thesis, the *tendenzroman*, especially if the tendency be sociological or religious, is one of the most popular of sugar-coatings for homiletic or demagogic pills. Since we are determined to take the novel seriously, the novel will take us so; and it is with a sort of guilty feeling of time and opportunity wasted that we allow ourselves to bask in the sunlight of fiction for fiction's sake; to let the fancy roam in search of "Treasure

¹ *The English Novel*, being a short sketch of its history from the earliest times to the appearance of *Waverley*; by Walter Raleigh; New York: Scribner's, 1894.

An Introduction to the Study of English Fiction; by William Edward Simonds, Ph.D.; Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1894.

Le Roman en France depuis 1610 jusqu'au nos jours; par Paul Morillot; Paris: Masson, 1895.

Islands" or climb the snowy Sheba's Breasts to find "King Solomon's Mines."

Novel reading is no longer a thing to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but discretely, advisedly, soberly. Wherefore the English University Extension authorities have induced Professor Raleigh to embrace so much as was possible of his admirable instruction at the University College, Liverpool, in a little book which is often quite as entertaining reading as the tales of which it treats. Wherefore, too, Professor Simonds, of our own Knox College, has given us an introduction to novel reading, a thing with which even Englishmen have usually become acquainted without any introduction at all. Hence, too, M. Morillot, of whom we may say something hereafter, realizing that the novel is the most important element in the most restless, if not the most vigorous of present literatures, has found its development worthy of pedagogical study.

Professor Simonds' book need not detain us long. His preface tells us that the evolution of the English novel is "an interesting story," but in endeavoring to tell that story in seventy-three pages, supplemented by one hundred and forty-two of extracts, he has essayed the impossible, and he has made his task the harder by giving more than a sixth of his space to works that are not novels at all, to "Beowulf," "King Horn," and the "Canterbury Tales," all in themselves as delightful as the "flowers that bloom in the spring," and about as little germane to the subject. One might almost as wisely discern the germ of one of Clark Russell's tales of shipwreck in the "Seven Wise Men of Gotham who went to Sea in a Bowl." This is the more to be regretted, since it is, as the author informs us in his preface, at the expense of any reference to Apuleius or to the relation of the novel to the drama which, as Raleigh may show us, is the relation of a child to its parents.

When Mr. Simonds gets well launched, however, in the current of "Romance at the Court of Elizabeth," he gives us, in well chosen English, good characterizations of the age and

of its chief novels, which, however, he will hardly persuade the majority of readers, or shall we say students, to read, for talent in that age found its best reward on the stage. It was not until the successors of the dramatists that illuminated with their wit the reign of the second Charles had imitated their mannerism without their realism, wearying the people with a stage that no longer held the mirror to nature, that the novel could claim equality if not preëminence among the literary genres. Even then the art of fiction was a sort of treasure trove, hit upon, as it were by chance, by Richardson, intent on compiling a book "of familiar letters on the useful concerns of common life," and stumbling on "Pamela," the first English novel directly linked with the present. Hit upon, too, by Fielding, who set out to parody Richardson, and found himself borne on the wings of unguessed genius to the creation of "Joseph Andrews" and "Tom Jones," monuments *ære perennius*.

Here, however, we have quite parted company with Mr. Simonds, who thinks Defoe the first English novelist, unless it should chance to be Bunyan, and cannot quite forgive Fielding for parodying "Virtue Rewarded," by which he showed, it seems, that he lacked "the refined sympathy of a thoroughly pure and virtuous character, and hence the ability to appreciate the latter's (Richardson's) aim or to recognize the actual merit of his performance". But we do more than part company, we join direct issue with the further statement that Fielding's humor is "mainly horse-play," nor would we admit "the absolute obscenity which frequently intrudes, with evident relish of design, upon his pages." We would deny the obscenity and justify the realism as essential to Fielding's artistic purpose, but above all, we protest against judging of the moral character of any writer from the scenes that he sees fit to depict as an artist. Again, how could "Fielding's laxity prepare the way for Smollett," whose "Roderick Random" preceded "Tom Jones" by a year, and belongs to a wholly different and inferior class of fiction, or for Sterne, "in whose hands vice

and vileness become not only humorous but admirable." Surely Mr. Simonds must have taken this opinion at second hand. Did his sensitive spirit shrink from reading "Tristram Shandy"? Professor Raleigh has taken his courage in both his hands; he has read the book, and like the woman who killed the goose with the golden eggs, found nothing within except that indefinable *aliquid* that is always found in masterpieces of humor, except by those "whose eyes are open but their sense is shut" save to the *odeur de femme*.

To say that in Sterne the novel "has fallen from the level where Richardson had placed it and where by Fielding, even, (*sic*) it had been maintained," is an attempt to rank writers whose aims admit of contrast but not of comparison. A critic, by the way, could do better than quote Thackeray's "English Humorists" to bolster his condemnation of Sterne; and while he is justified in predicating "a cleaner and sweeter atmosphere" of Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield," our first domestic tale, he should not have added "a truer artistry", without making some reserve for the book's lame conclusion, that makes it structurally inferior to "Tom Jones."

Mr. Simonds' next chapter, "The Perfection of the Novel," carries us from Goldsmith to George Eliot, and a brief conclusion discusses the tendencies of to-day. The former is, on the whole, the most satisfactory of the book, though the background of praise is occasionally "put in with a squirt," as when he speaks of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot as that "triumvirate of genius who placed the English novel where Shakspeare put the English drama, and left immortal characters behind them, not alone for English folk to know, but to delight the readers and lovers of stories the whole world through". A meticulous critic might demur to the title *triumvir* for the last of these authors, but our fault is chiefly with the indiscriminate linking together of what it is the business of the critic to keep asunder. It is darkening counsel to say that "in the varied work of these writers the English novel may be said to

have reached its climax." Climax of what? Of psychological analysis, of realistic description, of the "russet-coated epic" that struck Mr. Lanier's fancy, of romantic wonder, of moral purpose? There can be no single climax, for a genre so polyform, not to say amorphous, as the English novel.

The summary review of present tendencies with which Mr. Simonds closes his book should be helpful and suggestive. He is generously just to the French naturalists, just to the Russians, perhaps more than just to the Norwegians. The future, he thinks, is with realism, not pessimistic, but mingled, interpenetrated, with the sense of the beautiful. But who among us is to write this fiction, neither he nor his reviewer knows. Yet in spite of some critical defects and of some shortcomings due in part to brevity, the book should prove a welcome introduction to English fiction. We will not leave it without commending the excellent synchronizing tables for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nor the list of one hundred novels worth reading, which, though it is not quite our list, is a very good and suggestive one.

Professor Raleigh's book, however, is on a decidedly higher plane, both critically and stylistically. We shall let him speak in the main for himself, for to deprive his thought of its epigrammatic form would be to do him an injustice and to deny our readers a pleasure. What, for instance, can be happier, both in form and matter, than this on the effect of Walpole's "Castle of Otranto": "Walpole's temper and character would have qualified him better to be the critic or even the parodist" of the literary movement that he inaugurated and in some sense founded. "With no intention of criticism or parody, but in mere playfulness, he made a wooden jack-in-the-box. Wooden though it was, it served as a decoy for the multitude of ghosts that squeaked and gibbered in the highways of literature for a half a century and more, until in 'Frankenstein' and 'Melmoth, the Wanderer,' the romantic orgy reached its height."

It is a comfort to find some one with courage enough to call Paley's apologetics "an abyss of bathos", of course from a literary standpoint only, and how delightful is this sentence, at once criticism and parody: "'The Rambler' is not easy to read; or, rather to speak, as the case demands, the otiose prolongation of the periods and the superabundance of polysyllabic vocables, render the task of the intrepid adventurer who shall endeavor to peruse the earlier performances of this writer, an undertaking of no inconsiderable magnitude". Or, again, how pregnant are these sentences: "The novel held in Elizabeth's time very much the same place that was held by the drama at the Restoration; it was an essentially aristocratic entertainment. And the same pitfall waylaid both, the pitfall of artificiality. Dryden's audiences and the readers of the 'Arcadia' both sought for better bread than is made of wheat; and both were supplied with what satisfied them in an elaborate confection of husks." How nicely is Defoe's method hit in the words: "With Defoe the art of fiction came to be the art of grave imperturbable lying, in which art the best instructor is the truth". "The ordinary reader becomes so interested in the opinion that Defoe's characters (in 'Mrs. Veal') have of one another's veracity, that he forgets to ask whether they exist," which, it may be remarked in passing, they really did, as Mr. Aitken, surely no "ordinary reader," has recently discovered.¹ One might fill an article with citations as clever and as keen.

This book discriminates excellently between the talents of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett, and relegates Bunyan, Defoe, and Swift to their true place, which is not that of

¹ See his interesting article entitled "Defoe's 'Apparition of Mrs. Veal'" in *The Nineteenth Century* for January, 1895, a paper which seems not only to dispose of much of what Professor Raleigh and others have written about the story, but also to throw needed light upon Defoe's character and literary methods. It may be noted further that Professor F. M. Warren, of Adelbert College, has published, through Henry Holt & Co., "A History of the Novel Previous to the Seventeenth Century," which appeared too late for notice by our reviewer.—[EDITOR.]

writers of fiction. Johnson said that the author of "Pamela" "taught the passions to move at the command of virtue", which inspires Professor Raleigh to the delightful observation that Richardson's virtue is "a sort of showman leading his perfectly trained passions from place to place. Of a virtue that should inflame the higher, rather than allay the lower passions he had little or no idea." His "stories and characters would be alike spoilt by the intrusion of probability and realism". In short, he was just the man to be translated by the author of "Manon Lescaut", "the inaugurator of a century and a half of hyperæsthesia".

To pass from Richardson to Fielding is to pass from a hot-house to spring fields, bright with an "illuminating humor that is not focussed on vice, but shines like the sun on the evil and the good". "Common life is the material of the story, but it is handled here for the first time with the freedom and imagination of a great artist", while however excellent Richardson's handling of his own method might be, "only his patience and skill could manœuvre those legions of letters and feed them on chopped straw", so that "he could never become a teacher of method". What Richardson meant for a jealous reproach of Fielding, that "his brawls, his jars, his goals, his sponging-houses, are all drawn from what he has seen and known" is one of the chief sources of the latter's strength. His realism "is not laborious and minute, but it is sufficient".

In Smollett Professor Raleigh discerns a resemblance "to his countryman, Armstrong, of whom Beattie said that he seemed 'to have conceived a rooted aversion against the whole human race, except a few friends, which it seems are dead'". He had not Fielding's breadth of mind nor his depth of heart, and often degraded his picaresque novels to the ends of personal spite, and, as this was the part of his work most easily imitated, there presently arose a swarm of noxious scribblers who used the realistic camera "not in the service of art but of the police." "It is no palace of romance, no guild hall of comedy that they seek to erect,

but a hasty, low, earthwork, behind which they may lie on their bellies and shoot at their enemies”.

Among the happiest pages in Professor Raleigh's book are those that he devotes to Sterne's character, sentiment, and humor, all “held in a state of suspension rather than solution in a perfectly transparent medium”. There are few even of the lovers of Sterne who will not enjoy and appreciate him more for this judicious criticism that disengages his inimitable humor from his overwrought sentiment. Excellent, too, is the account of the fusing of the sentimental current that had its source in “*Tristram Shandy*” with that which flowed from Rousseau into the romantic revival in which “the man of feeling became an apostle and posed as the regenerator of society”. Fiction grew weaker for a time, but it was winning a closer touch with nature and from that contact it rose, Antæus like, in Scott, who “blended once more the opposed elements of comedy and romance.”

Nor when we pass from these classic masters of fiction to the revival of romance, to Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe, “*Monk*” Lewis and Maturin, is our critic's eye less keen or his touch less firm. This “*Renaissance of Wonder*” is well explained, psychologically, and analyzed in its technique in a way to which it is impossible to do justice here. Yet one cannot resist giving the reader a taste of its quality. Anne Radcliffe's “ignorance of the world at the time she wrote was complete and many sided. There was nothing in her books that she did not create. And it is a testimony to the power of her art that her fancy first conceived a type of character that subsequently passed from art into life. The man that Lord Byron tried to be was the invention of Mrs. Radcliffe.”

Beside this fiction of terror there springs up under the auspices of Rousseau the sociological novel, whose hero, the “natural man”, at first a sublimated Indian, becomes in Godwin's hands a true born Englishman. Natural virtue is a hard thing for the student of anthropology or history to

believe in, but it is a pleasant soothing syrup for children and a powerful ferment of discontent to the exploited classes of our modern social order. Accordingly we find the theory of the "natural man" producing in England the sweet simplicity of "Sandford and Merton" and the political *deliramenta* of Holcroft and Godwin.

The first of these is the real progenitor of the long line of juvenile stories, unmatched, whether in quantity or quality, in any other European literature. The other style raved its brief day and passed beyond reasonable criticism in the youthful novels of Shelley, which "combine more than the violence of Maturin's early works with more than the absurdity of Godwin's complacent dogma".

To these men who painted with crude colors and with the pallet knife there succeeded by a natural process of reaction the most delicately minute miniature painters of our English fiction, Miss Burney and Miss Austen, the god-parents of the domestic satire, the eldest of a distinguished group of women who take for a time the first place in fiction, in which they have always since maintained an honorable rank. In Mrs. Radcliffe's work there had been a distinctly masculine note. The "romance of the tea-table" as cultivated by Miss Austen, was unmistakably feminine. As Mr. Raleigh happily puts it: "A description of a sea fight or a murder by Miss Austen, a record of the conversation among a party of ladies around the tea-table of a vicarage by Sir Walter Scott, are gems for which the collector of curiosities may search in vain". For how could any man "describe the world as it seems to a woman utterly preoccupied with the thought of how she seems to the world", tutored in the proprieties and delicacies befitting a carefully nurtured British maid, who can lay bare without a blush a heart "prepared and inserted under clerical supervision".

Professor Raleigh's analysis of these domestic satires and of the fettered genius of Miss Edgeworth is as thoughtful and as just as what has preceded, and if the interest of

the reader flags a little here as in the chapters on the novel before Richardson, the fault is rather in the inferiority of the subject than in the critic's wit or judgment. And thus with a few words on the "historical novelists" before Scott, who "were saved by their invincible ignorance", because "the things that they knew to be false were so few", we are brought to "the first of the modern race of giants in fiction" and to the close of Professor Raleigh's delightful and helpful book whose sane criticism puts these older novelists, perhaps for the first time, in their true relation and perspective with an alchemy of wit that turns our pleasure to profit and leaves it pleasure still.

J. A.